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APPLIED FORESTRY NOTES

NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN
FOREST AND RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION
AND
COOPERATING AGENCIES*

No. 62 May, 1932 Missoula, Montana.

DROUGHT NOT YET BROKEN

By George M. Jemison, Junior Forester
Northern Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station

Available records do not indicate that the notorious drought of the last several years is as yet definitely broken. On the contrary, indications are that the dangers of exceptional dryness and high inflammability of the forests may be with us in 1932, just as in the four preceding seasons, unless more than normal precipitation occurs within the next few months.

This note of warning is therefore issued to prevent over-optimism based on inaccurate facts or on inferences which might be drawn from publicity of the last few months about the depth of snow in the mountains.

It is true that above-normal depths of snow have been reported from many mountain localities. Witness Priest River, Idaho, for example, where a depth greater than has previously been measured in 20 years occurred at the official snow stake. But an examination of precipitation records for several stations in this region indicates that caution should be used before coming to the conclusion that this plentiful snowfall of the past winter necessarily forecasts improved water supply and ground moisture for the summer of 1932, as compared with the summers of 1928, 1929, 1930, and 1931.

As shown by the attached chart, the records of five stations, representing eastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana, indicate that the region as a whole has not yet received marked relief from the prolonged drought that began in 1928. The records of five other stations, at higher elevations or more representative of forest conditions, also fail to show general

relief. As the normals for these forest stations are largely based on only a few years, those data have not been reproduced.

The cumulative deficiency of precipitation in inches from January, 1928, to May 1, 1932, at Spokane was 22.61; at Priest River, 16.31; at Libby °, 21.69; at Kalispell, 11.38; and at Missoula, 18.80. In other words, during the last four years most of the stations have received only three years of normal precipitation. Priest River is the only station that received more than normal rainfall each month during the past winter. Western Montana, however, apparently has received very little more moisture than during any of the three preceding winters.

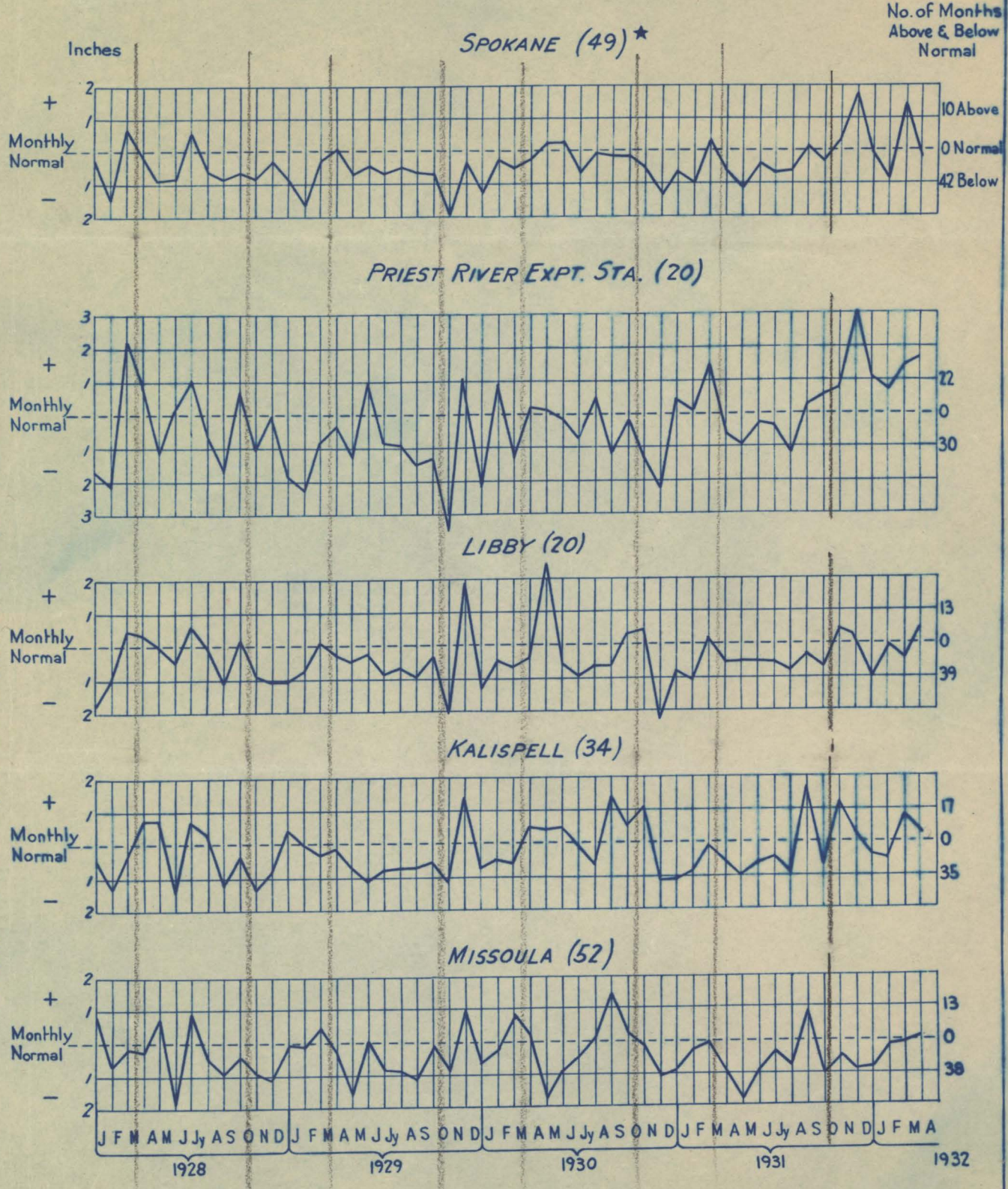
It would appear from this summary that while there may have been more snow on the ground in February or March, 1932, this probably was due to a lack of current melting rather than to more precipitation.

° Weather bureau normals for Libby include 16 years of records at Troy. In this article these figures have been corrected to show the normals for 20 years' records at Libby, only.

Forest Service, Region One; University of Montana; Montana State College of Agriculture; University of Idaho; Office of Blister Rust Control; Weather Bureau; Bureau of Entomology, and private agencies.

Departure of Precipitation from Normal by Months at Spokane, Priest River, Libby, Kalispell and Missoula

Jan. 1928 to Apr. 1932 inclusive



★ No. of years record as basis for Normal